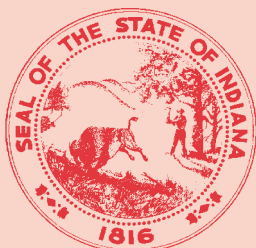


State Representative

Charlie Brown

The 2000 Session of the Indiana Legislature



How To Reach
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Spring, 2000

Dear Friends,

The 2000 session of the Indiana General Assembly ended on March 3.

We passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a plan to distribute the funds Indiana will receive from the tobacco settlement and a proposal to increase benefits for workers severely injured on the job. We also adjusted the unemployment compensation system, making improvements for both workers and employers.

I have detailed several new laws in this newsletter and have included some other information that you might find useful.

In the coming months, I will be working on interim study committees. Study committees allow legislators the opportunity to explore subjects in greater depth than is permitted during the session.

Please contact my office at 1-800-382-9842 if you have questions or concerns regarding state government.

Sincerely,



E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Inside this newsletter

Tobacco Settlement

Helping Working Families

School Safety

Increasing Insurance Coverage



Session News

School safety

School buses will be required to display the school or school district and its corresponding number on the back and top of the vehicles. This new requirement will make it easier to identify school buses and students in an emergency. In the case of an overturned school bus, officials will be able to identify the bus and find out where it is from in order to notify parents and locate medical information on students.

National concern about school safety played a role in passage of legislation that allows school security plans to remain confidential. The legislation also provides that school boards may meet in private to discuss the assessment, design and implementation of school safety and security measures.

We also enacted legislation that stiffens the penalties for speeding violations near a school to a Class B infraction. The maximum penalty for this offense is \$1,000.

Legislature allocates tobacco funds

Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.



The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.

Senior citizens will also see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food to eat or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.

Increasing insurance coverage

New legislation impacts dental, health insurance

I am pleased to announce that legislation enacted this session will go a long way to increasing insurance coverage for a number of individuals.

One change involving dental health maintenance organizations will mandate that licensed dentists be in charge of making decisions about dental claims. This bill is part of an ongoing effort by the General Assembly to place medical decision-making back into the hands of doctors.

Other legislation requires HMOs to cover patients for colorectal cancer testing based on standards established by the American Cancer Society. People found to be morbidly obese will receive coverage for necessary treatment, including surgery.

Legislative accomplishments

Benefits increased for those injured on the job

Legislators have approved measures that will make substantial changes in coverage for workers who are injured on the job and improve benefits for those people who have lost their jobs.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.

Medicaid disability definition adjusted

Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Indiana has the most restrictive Medicaid Disability definition in the nation. Forty-eight other states require that a person suffer from a disability for one year. New Hampshire is the only other state which requires a four- year disability.

With so many advances in health care, there is a treatment for almost every type of ailment. Medicaid was designed to help needy individuals, but the current system excludes so many from qualifying for the aid that most other states would offer them.

Crimes and Offenses

As is usually the case, legislators approved a series of initiatives that will help penalize those who engage in illegal behavior. It is now illegal to direct a laser pointer at a law enforcement official. These laser pointers are often used as toys, but law enforcement officials can easily misidentify laser pointers as weapons.

We enacted legislation to protect firefighters in the line of duty. A new offense of battery on a firefighter was created, and the penalty for this offense increases if the offender causes physical harm to the firefighter.

Murderers now will not be let off the hook because of the amount of time that has expired since the crime was committed or the death of the victim. A new bill lengthens the amount of time that can expire before a murderer can be convicted.

Victims of crime will be eligible to receive additional support through a law that increases the maximum award from the Violent Crime Compensation Fund to \$15,000.

Bias crimes will now be tracked

Law enforcement officials are now required to report data collected on bias crimes to the Indiana Central Repository for Criminal History. The legislation defines a bias crime as a crime that a person commits based on another person's race, creed, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

The purpose of this legislation is to use the collected data to assess whether or not a bias crime problem exists in Indiana.



Session News Organ Donations

Employees at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles will be required to ask whether driver's license applicants wish to make an anatomical gift. Those who choose to do so will have an identifying symbol their licenses.

Often, individuals believe that they are registered as organ donors, but in fact they are not.

The Bureau of Motor Vehicles will now have the ability to establish the Anatomical Gift Promotion Fund, which would receive donations for organizations that promote the procurement of organs for anatomical gifts.

IHSAA

The General Assembly addressed parent concerns about the Indiana High School Athletic Association through legislation that creates a panel to review appeals of rulings made by the IHSAA.

The panel will consist of parents, high school principals and athletic directors. Issues that they will rule on include the eligibility of student athletes. In the past, appeals of IHSAA decisions often led to lengthy, expensive court fights. Now, the panel will address appeals and save students and parents time and money.



Rep. Charlie Brown

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Call the Statehouse toll-free
1-800-382-9842

*See inside to add your name
to my e-mail update group*

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Representatives

State legislative web site

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at www.state.in.us/R3 and explore various items related to the legislature.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women's health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year's legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 1-800-382-9842.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

Top Five State Web Sites*

1. State Job Bank
2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
4. General Assembly homepage
5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage

*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000